


The State of Rural Canada:

Questions for Candidates

<http://www.sorc.crrf.ca/resources>


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- A rural vision
- Demography
- Rural economy
- Aboriginal peoples
- Poverty and inequality
- Infrastructure and services
- Financing
- Environment
- Governance
- Information and knowledge



RPLC
RURAL POLICY LEARNING COMMONS

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DES POLITIQUES RURALES



- 7 minutes max
- The timing of the election provides an opportunity to consider this report from the point of view of voters, candidates, and media.
- *We began considering which of the issues raised in this report would be useful to highlight as we consider choosing our future policy-makers.*
- We went to the authors to identify these – along with the types of questions that might be asked of political candidates wherever they may be.
- We produced a document that represents a distillation from the many issues and questions that emerged (<http://crrf.ca>).
- *They are meant to stimulate your thinking about which of the issues might be important to clarify with candidates.*
- We encourage you to take a look at this document and formulate your own versions of the questions where you feel improvement is necessary.
- It is especially important that you consider how these issues are manifested in your local region – and develop questions that are appropriate for that region.
- To the media: we encourage you to adapt them for media scrum conditions, but also to use them as inspiration for more in-depth investigations and material.
- To all of you, we welcome continued dialogue about these and other issues that you feel we have missed or misrepresented.
- In my presentation I will quickly identify the issues mentioned in the document – along with a few comments about the significance of those issues.



- The first issue we have identified is a general one – their vision for rural Canada.
- Rural places are different than urban ones in many important ways.
- They are places where food, transportation, energy, industry, health, education, and the environment intersect – making sectoral approaches incomplete and often misleading.
- There are few places in government where serious discussions about this intersection can take place.
 - How do the current set of candidates feel about that?
 - Do they have a wholistic view of rural places and people?
 - How is this reflected in their policies?
-
 - Throughout CRRF's history we have argued that rural people and places are different than urban, and hat their welfare affects all Canadians.*
 - We have also argued that the welfare of rural Canada depends on a wholistic approach to policy and practice.*
 - In 1996 we presented a document entitled "Toward a Whole Rural Policy for Canada" that remains relevant even today.*
 - This State of Rural Canada report and the upcoming election provides another occasion to make the case that we need such a policy and people in power who are sensitive to the special challenges and opportunities of those in rural, remote, and northern places.*
 - [Apedaile, L P, and Bill Reimer. 1996. Towards a Whole Rural Policy for Canada. Edited by The Agriculture Group and Rural Restructuring. Ottawa: The Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation.]*
 - I haven't heard any party speaking about rural in general. Even the discourse on northern issues is fragmented into sectors and there are few places in government where serious discussions about the interaction of food, energy, industry, health, labour, transportation, education, and the environment can take place.*
 - How do the current set of candidates feel about that?*
 - Do they have a wholistic view of rural places and people?*
 - How is this reflected in their policies?*

Demographic and Economic Characteristics



9/14/2015

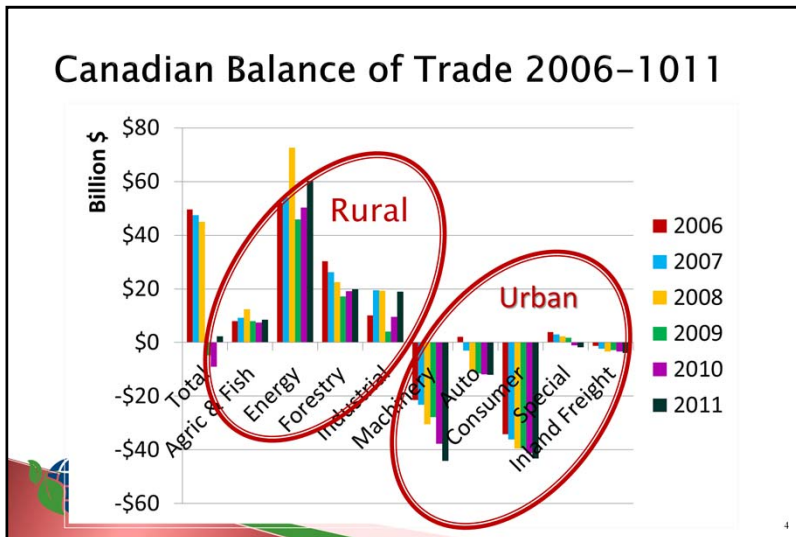
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•Demographic and Economic Characteristics

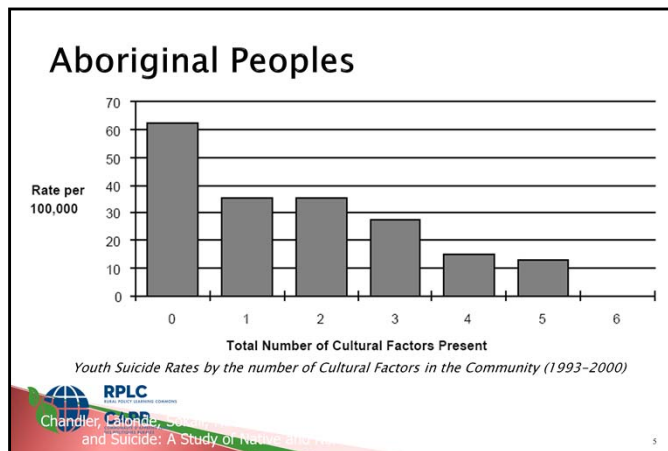
- Rural Canada is diverse and changing. This is a clear message from the State of Rural Canada report.
- Some places are growing rapidly, others declining rapidly, and still others are slowly growing old or growing young.
- Who is keeping track of these changes?
- How do the candidates suggest we deal with this diversity – and how should we deal with the specific types of conditions it generates?
- Are they even aware of them? Are they operating with outdated understandings of rural places?
- How might rural Canadians respond to immigration opportunities – like the one currently presenting itself in the middle east?

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- This is an opportunity to ask a question of municipal policy-makers – especially those where the population is aging or declining.*
 - You need people – there are plenty of people in need of a home and security*
 - Can I inspire your rural communities to act as a port of entry for refugees and immigrants?*
 - You often have infrastructure that might be empty or too expensive to maintain: homes, schools, clinics, businesses, arenas, etc.*
 - More important – you are experts in social support*
 - Consider Gander when it was inundated with jet planes on 9/11*
 - Consider so many other towns that can quickly mobilize support when a fire threatens, a flood arises, or a family tragedy occurs*
 - As a port of entry you could welcome strangers, teach them your language, help them understand the Canadian education, health, business systems.*
 - Show them how to fill out forms, shop for clothes, find a hardware store.*
 - And participate in community affairs – learn how to live with others who are different.*
 - Prepare them for a life in Canada like we have been doing for most of the last century.*
 - They don't have to stay in your town as long as there are others who can take their place.*
 - Like schools and universities you can celebrate their graduation as they move to other places*
 - Embrace your role as the screening community to identify potential problems – health, family crises, and even terrorism.*
- Market your collective skills to the institutions that will benefit from your efforts*
 - Banks, pharmaceutical companies, clothing companies, car sellers, most of our service businesses and of course the government. – why not ask them to pay for your services?*
- You are guaranteed to be a better community for it as you collectively grapple with the challenges of new people, new customs*
 - Develop your home-grown solutions*
 - Learn from your new visitors*
 - And find new friends.*
- If you are interested – let me know*
 - There are communities that have been doing this for a long time*
 - I'm sure they will be happy to pass on their own tips and experiences*
- Go to your candidates and ask them how they will make it easier for communities to provide this service.*



- The Rural Economy (especially timely since the economy is the topic of tonight's leaders's debate)
- Canadians have always been hewers of wood and carriers of water.
- It was our rural-based resources that got us through the latest financial crisis and it is our dependence on them that carries us on the roller-coaster of boom and bust.
- We can see why on the graph: Most of the items with a positive balance of trade are rural-related: we pay for our consumer goods by selling our natural resources.
 - *Agriculture and fish, energy, forestry, and some industrial*
 - *Most of the urban-based items have a negative balance of trade: Machinery, automobile, consumer, and inland freight.*
- *Rural-urban economic interdependence is indirect and often invisible*
 - *Resource commodities are traded internationally*
 - *Consumer goods are imported*
 - *We pay for the latter by the former*
- How do our candidates feel about this?
 - *At various times in our history we have attempted to get off the commodity trade treadmill but keep coming back when demand is high.*
 - *What happened to the principle of economic diversification?*
 - *What will they do about it?*
- Will these issues be discussed tonight at the leader's debate?



- There are plenty of questions to be posed about Aboriginal Peoples
 - Our track record in working with them is dismal
 - Too often our governments take a “blame the victim” approach.
- We know a lot about what we are doing wrong – and we know about what is needed
- This graph represents one of my favorite illustrations of what we know.
- *Chandler, Lalonde, Sokall, Hall, et al. (2003:43) Personal Persistence, Identity Development, and Suicide: A Study of Native and Non-Native North American Adolescents.*
- *In their work on adolescent suicide among Aboriginal peoples, researchers discovered a very strong relationship between the failure to recognize aboriginal culture and suicide*
 - In those communities where the history and culture were celebrated, the suicide rate dropped dramatically
 - *That’s a drop from about 60 suicides per 100,000 (well above the average Canadian rate of 11.5) to 0.*
- Why do we continue to ignore the power of community and the legitimacy of aboriginal cultures?
- Ask your candidates the questions and test their answers against the research.
- Use the knowledge to ensure the right people get in place.

• [Their subsequent work has led them to argue that:

- A strong sense of identity and continuity is essential for healthy personal and social resiliency (and an important mitigating factor against suicide)
- Identity and continuity is rooted in local events, relationships, and history – especially among narrative-based cultures
- Undermining the legitimacy and credibility of this local history and relationships has significant negative effects on the identity of those closely connected with it – especially among narrative-based cultures
- This research, and supporting work among rural Quebec adolescents suggests to me that place-based perspectives are more important than simply a special focus of analysis for designing our policy and research – they touch on a critical feature of our sense of self and humanity along with our ability to function in confidence and sympathy with others
- It also suggests that we need to aggressively seek to understand the nature and relationship between narrative and essentialist approaches to the world
 - Our disastrous policies directed to the eradication of Aboriginal culture, the elimination of cultural and ethnic traditions, and the relocation of communities makes clear that the eradication of narrative for essentialist approaches is not the way to go
 - Instead, we are much better off searching for new ways in which the strengths of narrative understandings can be integrated with those of essentialist approaches to build new forms of governance which respect local places
- Cultural continuity factors:
 - Recognized institutions of self-government
 - History of Land Claims actions
 - Cultural Education – Majority of students attend a band-administered school
 - Level of local control over health services
 - Number of local cultural facilities
 - Extent to which local band controlled Police and Fire services]

Poverty and Inequality



9/14/2015

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- Rural poverty and Inequality issues are closely related to aboriginal ones.
- Rural poverty and inequality looks different than urban
 - *Rural homelessness is about sleeping on couches and growing old alone*
 - *Rural inequality is often manifested in comparisons between communities not so much individuals*
- Urban solutions often don't work in rural places because of distance, density, and identity differences.
 - *Services are often not accessible – especially for stigmatized groups*
 - *And especially when access to transportation is difficult*
 - *Single parents don't have the same options for day care*
 - *The elderly are more vulnerable if family is not willing or able to provide supports*
- Do the candidates understand these differences?
- Do they offer solutions that make sense in your town?



- Rural Infrastructure and Services

- Since the 1970s we have largely moved from a “citizen” model of social service delivery to a “consumer” one.

- The “user pays” approach largely goes unchallenged when we justify political choices for transportation, snow removal, education, and even health services.*

- This puts rural people and places at a significant disadvantage since the critical mass is missing and the extra costs of distance cannot be covered if we take a narrow per capita approach on the distribution of national assets.

- Adequate infrastructure and services for rural communities challenges this individual focus on their distribution.*

- Especially when the less tangeable contributions of rural people and places are not costed: like environmental stewardship, ancestral use of the resources, security, or heritage.*

- It doesn't have to be this way as demonstrated in other countries and some provinces.

- Norway provides resources and services to its rural communities that are not built on a per capita calculation.*

- They recognize that there is value in supporting a small town for the social, psychological, health, stewardship, natural resource, environmental, and security benefits it provides to the nation.*

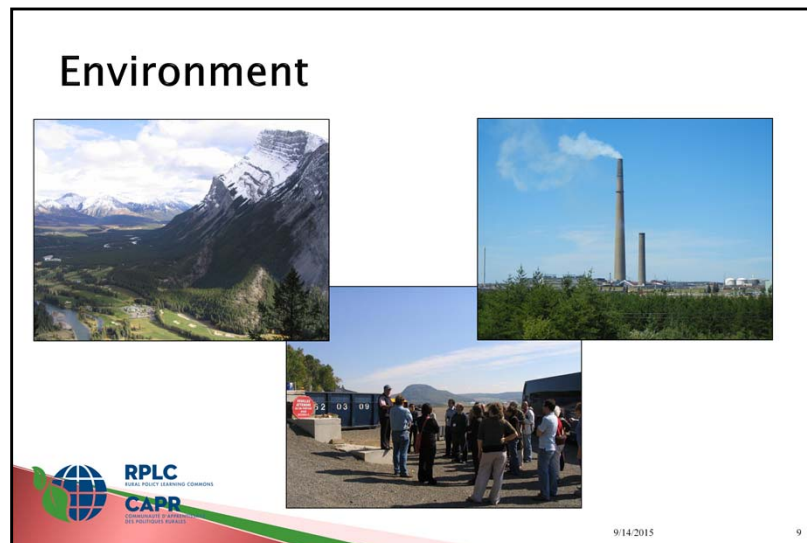
- What's the perspective of your potential MP?

- Does he or she see you as a citizen or a consumer of government resources?

- Is your community treated as a national asset or simply an artifact of convenience for the extraction or commercialization of resources?



- Financing is closely related to many of these issues.
- Municipalities have been given more responsibilities, less authority, and fewer resources as senior governments cut back
 - In fact, the federal government has largely withdrawn from the municipal field with the closure of the Rural Secretariat.*
- This is a recipe for disaster – as we have seen in the Walkerton tragedy.
- How would your candidate support municipal councils, small rural businesses, and the significant pool of talent in rural areas?
- How would they ensure that banks, financial institutions, and insurance companies develop a better understanding of rural financial risk and where the urban models should not be used for rural places
 - This is especially the case for insurance companies – often the greatest impediment to the flexible use of available infrastructure in small towns, like schools, churches, arenas, and industrial buildings.*
- FCM. (2015).
Municipal_Finance_and_Intergovernmental_Arrangements_Policy_Statement_EN.pdf
 (p. 11). Ottawa: Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Retrieved from
https://www.fcm.ca/Documents/corporate-resources/policy-statements/Municipal_Finance_and_Intergovernmental_Arrangements_Policy_Statement_EN.pdf
 - Excessive reliance on property taxes*
 - Downloading responsibilities*
 - Reduced financial transfers*



- Environment

- It has taken us a long time to recognize how much we have affected the environment by our heavy dependence on commodity economics.
- Even with the loss of our fisheries as a national wake-up call we still resist the lesson of sustainability.
- Has your candidate learned this lesson?
- What will he or she do about it?
- Do they recognize that rural places are where the greatest impacts of climate change are being felt?
- How are they preparing for the fires, floods, winds, and drought that are most likely in our future?*
- What is their plan to move us away from fossil fuels?
 - To what extent will those plans include support for the small towns and remote places that are already highly stressed?

Governance



- Governance

- The demands on rural and northern communities have increased even as the pool of volunteers has declined and the capacity of their citizens has been stretched.

- A small town can't afford a planner, engineer, or police force like a large one can – and most of the town officials are fulfilling their role off the side of their desks, learning how to conduct meetings, manage controversy, and solve crises without the support of a communications expert, lawyer, or financial manager.*

- Does your candidate know this?

- How is your candidate's party going to build that capacity – financially, technologically, and educationally?

- What solutions do they propose so that small towns can free up the talent and innovation that has been such a significant part of their history?



- Information and Knowledge Development
- One of the most important tools for effective governance is the availability of useful, reliable information about the conditions in which we are operating.
- An unrealistic view of the world basically guarantees that even the best intentions will be in vain.
- Yet, over the last 15 years we have seen the erosion of the tools that ensure our knowledge is reliable and our interpretations of the data are reasonable.
- *We have lost the long form census – the only public, reliable data-gathering tool that has enough cases to be useful to small towns.*
- *We have also seen the loss of many of our rural research centres as financing for research has diminished, the attention has been withdrawn from rural issues, and the basic principles of scientific learning (transparency and communication) has been removed from our public agencies.*
- Does your candidate see these as problems for rural people and places?
- If so, how will they reverse them so that we can have more confidence in the policy options available and the presumed consequences of our actions?
- *Primary NRE centres are in yellow*

Aurora Research Institute: Aurora College
 Brandon U. - Rural Development Institute
 Canadian Plains Research Center
 Canadian Rural Health Research Society
 Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development, UNB
 Centre for Rural and Northern Health Research
 Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment, Muenster, Saskatchewan
 Centre for Sustainable Community Development at SFU
 Chaire de recherche du Canada en développement des collectivités (UQO)
 Chaire de recherche du Canada en développement régional et territorial (UQAR)
 Chaire Desjardins en développement des petites collectivités (UQAT)
 Churchill Northern Studies Centre
 Coastal Communities Projects
 MUN - Sir Wilfred Grenfell College - Center for Environmental Excellence for Education, Technology, Research and Development
 New Emerging Team for Health in Rural and Northern British Columbia (NETHRN)
 New Rural Economy Project
 Northern Research Institute (NRI): Programs and Links
 NRE2 Partner and Co-investigator (Chouinard)
 Prairie Region Health Promotion Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan
 Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development (Penfold)

Rural and Small Town Programme
 Rural Planning and Development - Guelph
 The Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development
 The Monieson Centre - Queen's School of Business
 U. of Northern BC - Community and Development Institute
 Université de Moncton (Chouinard)
 University of Saskatchewan - Canada Rural Economy Research Lab (C-RERL)
 University of Saskatchewan - Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment
 University Research Chair in Rural Gender Studies
Closed or completed
 Rural and Small Town Programme
 Truro (amalgamated)
 C-RERL
 Rural Secretariat - Canada
 NETHRN - BC
 The New Rural Economy Project
 Chaire de recherche du Canada en développement régional et territorial (UQAR)
 NRE2 Partner and Co-investigator (Chouinard)
 The Monieson Centre - Queen's School of Business
 Centre for Rural Studies and Enrichment

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